Lapine Faith: The Importance of the Quasi-Religious Structure in Richard Adams' *Watership Down*

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Benjamin J. Benefiel

Thesis Advisor

Julia M. Corbett

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

April 25, 1999

Expected Date of Graduation:

May 8, 1999

Table of Contents

Abstract

This discussion of Richard Adams' contemporary classic novel *Watership Down*, a tale of survival for a group of wandering rabbits, analyzes the importance of the quasi-religious structure of the characters within. Through the lapine mythological storytelling tradition, the characters of the novel can understand the role they fulfill in the natural world. This analysis is divided into five basic sections: the general trend of the characters' belief system; the lapine comprehension of deity; the archetypical rabbit folk-hero; the nature of death; and finally, divergent rabbit traditions within the novel. This study of the importance of the myth tradition within the rabbit culture allows the reader to more fully understand and appreciate the depth of the Mr. Adams' epic work, as well as glean insight into the meaning of human existence of which we are all a part.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Julia Corbett, my thesis advisor, for her patience as I slowly but surely finished this work, as well as for all the help and mentorship she has given me in my pursuit of a Religious Studies major. I would also thank Rebecca Whaling, my fiancée, who was willing to stay up until nearly sunrise to help me proofread and edit the final copy of this thesis. It is much appreciated! Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Richard Adams himself, whose characters I will never forget.

Introduction

In 1972, British author Richard Adams published *Watership Down*, an epic novel of adventure centered around a group of wandering rabbits. With an unknown danger approaching their doomed warren, this band sets out to discover a place of "high, lonely hills, where the wind and the sound carry and the ground's as dry as straw in a barn" (*Watership*, 60)[1]. The novel details their adventures in finding such a paradise, as well as their trials and tribulations of avoiding a fate like that of their first home. Winner of numerous awards and acclamations (including nearly a year as Number One on the New York Times Bestseller List) and produced six years later as a full-length motion picture, this grand tale is truly a contemporary classic.

Part of what makes this novel so special to so many people is the author's great attention to detail. Richard Adams gave a unique personality not only to each rabbit character, but to their entire society as well. He crafted a vocabulary singular to these creatures in order to describe all aspects of life: natural occurances, bodily functions, as well as other creatures. Of all the societal aspects which Mr. Adams created, the most outstanding is his conception of rabbit spirituality. Through the quasi-religious themes of the novel, the reader is able to more fully understand and appreciate the depth and integrity of the story

---

[1] Due to fact that I am citing various sources with the word "Watership" in the title, all of which associated with Mr. Adams, I feel it necessary to distinguish between my citations. For the original novel *Watership Down*, I will use the term *Watership*. For *Tales from Watership Down*, I will use *Tales*, and for the animated feature film version of *Watership Down* I will use the term Film. For additional sources, however, I will cite them by name of author.

and its characters. Without this aspect of the novel, the reader has but a series of events experienced by a handful of lapine characters; with the religious dimension, the reader is able to understand how the rabbits relate to each other and the rest of the world, how they view the nature of death and thus the meaning of life, and most importantly what it means to be a rabbit. Without an understanding of the religious aspects of the novel, a reader of *Watership Down* would be lost in trying to understand these characters as real beings in a real world.

The goal of this analysis is to attempt to explain this aspect of *Watership Down*. Using the original novel as the main point of reference, I intend to explain the nature of the lapine characters' beliefs, as well as the role those beliefs play in the rabbits' understanding of themselves. In addition to Adams' original novel, I will also refer to his later publication *Tales from Watership Down*, a collection of adventures involving the rabbits of the Watership Down warren after the climax of the original novel. Included in this book are a number of lapine myths in their entirety, only slightly touched upon in the first work. *Tales from Watership Down* will be cited as supporting material for aspects from the first book. Third, I will refer to the feature film version of *Watership Down* for quotations more succinctly phrased than in the novel, as well as for one specific event in the story which was changed in the transfer to film. The film version of this event ties more strongly to the topics at hand. Finally, I will refer to works by various scholars in the field of comparative religion to help explain the importance of a religious structure in defining oneself. While familiarity with the novel will help the reader more fully

understand the points made in this analysis, I am providing background to some of the more important rabbit myths for those who have no acquaintance with Mr. Adams' work.

Specifically, this analysis is divided into five areas. The first is the general structure of rabbit beliefs and how they are communicated. The second area concerns Frith, the sun deity, and his creation in relationship to the rabbit community. Thirdly, there is El-ahrairah, the primal rabbit, and his role in the rabbit community's self-understanding. The fourth section deals with the Black Rabbit of Inlé (the lapine angel of death) and the rabbit understanding of mortality. Finally, the fifth section discusses the spiritual variation of two enemy warrens in the novel, Efrafa and the Warren of Shining Wires, and how this variation is due to humankind's disregard to the natural order. While there are many other aspects to the rabbits' beliefs (such as the mythological characters of Prince Rainbow, the archetypical human figure and Rowsby Woof, the archetypical canine figure), I have decided not to cover these in their own sections. The reason for this is because they have little importance on their own and serve mainly to reinforce the importance of the major lapine religious beliefs.

The Story of El-ahrairah's Blessing

Long ago, the great Frith made the world. He made all the stars, and the world lived among the stars. Frith made all the animals and birds, and at first made them all the same. Now among the animals was El-ahrairah, the Prince of Rabbits. He had many friends, and they all ate grass together. But after a time the rabbits wandered everywhere, multiplying and eating as they went. Then Frith said to El-ahrairah, "Prince Rabbit, if you cannot control your people, I shall find ways to control them." But El-ahrairah would not listen and said to Frith, "My people are the strongest in the world."

This angered Frith, so he determined to get the better of El-ahrairah. He gave a present to every animal and bird, making each one different from the rest. When the fox came, and others like the dog and cat, the hawk and weasel, to each of them Frith gave the fierce desire to hunt and slay the children of El-ahrairah. And El-ahrairah knew that Frith was too clever for him, and he was frightened. He had never before seen the Black Rabbit of Death.

"My friend," said Frith, "have you seen El-ahrairah? For I wish to give him a gift."

"Uh. . . no, I-I-I have not seen him," [replied El-ahrairah, with only his bottom visible from the hole he was digging].

"So," Frith said, "come out, and I will bless *you* instead."

"No, I cannot. I am busy. The fox and weasel are coming. If you want to bless me, you'll have to bless my *bottom*."

"Very well, be it so."

And El-ahrairah's tail grew shining white, and flashed like a star. His back legs grew long and powerful, and he tore across the hill faster than any creature in the world.

[So Frith said,] "All the world will be your enemy, Prince-with-a-Thousand-Enemies, and whenever they catch you, they will kill you. But first they must catch you, digger, listener, runner, prince with the swift warning. Be cunning, and full of tricks, and your people with never be destroyed" (Film).

The Framework: Three General Trends

Within the quasi-religious framework of the lapine culture in *Watership Down*, there exist three general trends that structure the belief system of the characters in the novel. It is upon these three points that their beliefs are able to stand, and from these standing beliefs comes the rabbits' reinforcement of who they view themselves to be. The first of these basic points is that their belief system is relayed from generation to generation through allegorical form. The second point is that the world of the spiritual and the world of the mundane are viewed as one, though separated by both a literal and metaphorical distance. The third and final supporting point is that the natural order has been divinely ordained.

The heart of lapine spirituality rests in idea of myth. Both *Watership Down* and the later book *Tales from Watership Down* are replete with myths handed down through the rabbit generations in order to teach various lessons about life. These myths are presented in a manner as though the author himself were a member of the rabbit community. This fact is important to recognize because it allows an understanding of how the characters view the myths themselves as opposed to the biased view of an outsider. This allows the outsider to more fully comprehend how the myth relates to the lapine worldview.

The spoken mythology of the rabbit community allows its religious tradition to continue without the necessity of more advanced forms of religious teaching, such as scripture, ritual, and clerical duties. To the rabbits of *Watership Down*, the storytelling tradition fills each of these needs. The spoken word becomes the

substitute for scripture, the act of storytelling fulfills the need for reinforcement of belief through ritual, and the storytellers become those most responsible for overseeing the dissemination of these beliefs to the population.

Since these beliefs are transferred through generations by word of mouth, there exists the opportunity for unique adoptions and adaptations to these tales. Because of this fact, the traditional stories of the lapine culture are constantly changing by slight degrees, while new stories are being added to the repertoire through the adventures and experiences of the contemporary rabbit. "'Our children's children will hear a good story,' answered Hazel, quoting a rabbit proverb" (*Watership*, 371) after the characters' dramatic escape from the oppressive warren of Efrafa. However, while the rabbits acknowledge that their adventures can become stories for the entertainment of future generations, they do not acknowledge the apparent fact that these same stories often become intertwined with their traditional mythology.

> "So after they had swum the river," said Vilthuril, "El-ahrairah led his people on in the dark, through a wild lonely place. Some of them were afraid, but he knew the way and in the morning he brought them safely to some green fields, very beautiful, with good, sweet grass. And here they found a warren; a warren that was bewitched. All the rabbits in this warren were in the power of a wicked spell. They wore shining collars around their necks and sang like birds and some of them could fly. But for all they looked so fine, their hearts were dark and tharn [insane]. So then El-ahrairah's people said, 'Ah, see, these are the wonderful rabbits of Prince Rainbow. They are like princes themselves. We will live with them and become princes, too.'. .
>
> "But Frith came to Rabscuttle in a dream and warned him that that warren was enchanted. And he dug into the ground to find where the spell was buried. Deep he dug, and hard was the search, but at last he found that wicked spell and dragged it out. So they all fled from it, but it turned into a great rat and flew at El-ahrairah. Then El-ahrairah fought the rat, up and down, and at last he held it, pinned it under his claws, and it turned into a great white bird which spoke to him and blessed him.

"I seem to know this story,' whispered Hazel, 'but I can't remember where I've heard it" (*Watership*, 470-471).

While this passage may seem like a garbled, confused, nonsense tale at first sight, it is in actuality the story of *Watership Down*. Various facts and events have been rearranged or disregarded, but in essence it is a recounting of the events which the group of rabbits encountered during their trek from the Sandleford warren to find their new home. Swimming in the river refers to the time when Hazel led his friends across a stream to escape a wild dog; the enchanted rabbits with the shining collars refers to Cowslip's snared Warren of Shining Wires which was heavy with the human scent ("Prince Rainbow"); the great white bird which blessed El-ahrairah refers to the rabbits' friend Kehaar, the gull, without whose aid the Watership Down warren could not have been established. A comment that the character Bigwig made concerning the strangeness of Cowslip's rabbits is the basis of the idea that these enchanted rabbits could fly and sing like birds. Obviously, it may be true that many (if not all) of the mythological tales told by the storytellers are in fact the twisted versions of real events experienced by real rabbits of generations passed. Stories which demonstrate the courage and ability of rabbits to survive against all odds are transformed into tales with which future generations may identify. Herein lies the true importance of the lapine myth.

Throughout Mr. Adams' two books, the rabbit characters look towards these stories for guidance and faith in understanding the proper role of rabbits in the world. They utilize these myths to grasp the ideal of what it means to be a rabbit- the true nature of rabbithood. Each of their myths deal with an instance in

which El-ahrairah, the Prince of Rabbits, uses his rabbit skills (such as his speed, which is his gift, or his trickery, which is his obligation) to demonstrate the ability of his kind to perpetuate itself. Using this archetypical figure as a role model, the characters in the novel are able to understand their necessary role in creation as they see it, which in turn allows them to perpetuate the species. Their individual acts, based on these tales, then become the basis for future tales which will allow future generations to understand their duties and perpetuate themselves, thus providing material for even more myths, and so on. This cycle, unbeknownst to the rabbit characters, is what allows their species to continue through the generations, and herein lies the true importance of their religious beliefs. Religious studies scholar James C. Livingston says that "myths provide models. . . by which we can envision the entire world. . . Myth also shapes our sense of self, or who we are. . . and sanctions models of behavior and moral norms. . . Finally, they portray why evil and chaos threaten our world. . . and what we must do to be saved, liberated, or renewed" (Livingston, 86-87). The rabbits are able to continue as a species due to what they are, and what they are is taught to them through their myths.

The second general point in understanding the nature of the lapine belief system is that the spiritual and physical worlds are neither separate entities nor one and the same. These two spheres of experience exist beside one another, and are indeed connected to some degree both in a real and metaphorical sense. While most rabbits have very little direct contact, if any, with the spiritual realm (at least while alive) as they see it, there are a number of instances in the

novel and its sequel which demonstrate that this is not universal. Fiver, one of the most prominent characters in the story, and Hyzenthlay, a doe saved from the oppressive warren of Efrafa, are both shown to have an unusual connection with this otherworldly realm. Additionally, Silverweed (one of the rabbits of the Warren of Shining Wires) was shown to have a dark and foreboding affinity to this sphere of existance, and the tale of El-ahrairah jouneying to the warren of the Black Rabbit of Inlé provides a traditional basis of belief in such a place.

This spiritual realm is often referred to in terms of location. As shown by various incidents in the novel, rabbits have little ability to actively comprend abstraction (such as Hazel's inability to understand what a *shape* is in the Warren of Shining Wires). As such, otherworldliness must be thought of in very concrete terms- resulting in the fact that rabbits in the novel view the spiritual realm as a literal place, while not lending much thought as to *where* it would be. For instance, in the tale of El-ahrairah and the Black Rabbit of Inlé, the rabbit prince journeys to find the Black Rabbit and implore his help in saving the rabbit population from a terrible fate. The physical journey, over cold hard rocks and barrens wastelands, is described to the best degree the storyteller can (*Watership*, 276). Fiver describes it as "another place, another country. . . We go there when we sleep; at other times, too; and when we die. [But] El-ahrairah comes and goes between the two as he wants" (*Watership*, 253). As El-ahrairah is identified with this place, so too do the stories surrounding him (as well as the other mythic characters he meets on his many journeys) take on an otherworldly air in many cases. In this sense, in addition to those like Fiver who seem to have

a kind of direct link to this place, other rabbits may experience it in an indirect manner through the words of the storyteller. They can understand what sort of creature the Black Rabbit is, they can comprehend the experiences of El-ahrairah in his many travels, and they know the will of Frith and his divine plan; all of these things the common rabbit can experience, although imperfectly and indirectly, through the storytelling tradition. Fiver is one who does not need the stories to connect with this realm; at one point in the novel, his companions notice that he is "now more than ever governed. . . by the pulse of that mysterious world of which he had once spoken to Hazel" (*Watership*, 466). While the realm of the spiritual is its own proper place, it is able to connect on a mental level with those not necessarily present in it. As such, while it is not a realm which most rabbits can experience, this other world of spirit is nevertheless viewed as validly existent due to the trickle-down relationship between such a realm and the common rabbit due to the storytelling tradition.

The final point of note is that the spirituality of the novel and its characters is based firmly in the dichotomy of order and chaos, divinely willed, in the conflict between the natural and the unnatural. In the lapine worldview, Frith has created the world in a natural order which he has deemed pleasurable to him. Unnatural acts are those acts against Lord Frith, and are those acts which break apart the system which he has created. The present world order is the result of Frith's preemptive move to maintain order after the world was thrown from balance due to the actions of an egotistical creature named El-ahrairah and his rabbit descendants.

Due to the rabbits overstepping their intended natural boundaries, the rabbits themselves believe, it was necessary for the creator to alter his creation to maintain the originally intended natural balance. To maintain this balance, it was necessary for the creator to change his paradise into a rougher and more violent place (similar to biblical account of God banning Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden). Such an idea serves to reinforce self-importance; obviously, a rabbit would believe, if Frith did not think so highly of this fragment of creation, then he simply would have destroyed the rabbits and thought no more about the subject. Order could have been maintained in this fashion; however, since Frith did not opt for this choice, it stands to reason that it is because rabbits serve a unique purpose in the divine plan and that this unique purpose is ingrained in the notion of natural balance. Supporting this idea is the fact that not only did Frith alter creation to allow these rabbits to survive, but he made with them a covenant that they would never be destroyed. The conditions of this promise were such that as long as the rabbits used their gifts from Frith (their speed, cunning, and trickery), they would never perish from the face of the earth. This divine promise emphasizes the belief that rabbits are the highest of equals among Frith's children.

The storytelling tradition, the idea of an attachment between the mythic and the real, and the importance of the divine natural order are all interconnected in the subconscious of the rabbits of *Watership Down*. Each of these points is like the side of a triangle which, when connected, form a shape which allows rabbits to define themselves in relationship to the world in which they live.

Without an understanding of how these themes support one another and the entire quasi-religious system of the characters, any reader of *Watership Down* is at a loss in appreciating the complexity and realism of Richard Adams' work. Without this knowledge, the book becomes a limp and meaningless compilation of papers decorated with an assortment of words; however, an understanding of how the characters see themselves transforms this work into a true contemporary classic. Such a masterpiece is timeless because it allows its readers a chance of understanding themselves in the process.

Frith and His Creation: The Significance of a Promise

The idea of deity expressed by the rabbits of *Watership Down* is that of Lord Frith. Frith is the divine creator; he is a personal being who is both concretely and abstractly above and yet intertwined with his creation. He is a rational being who uses his divine authority not for the promotion of conceptual notions of good and evil, but for the maintenance of the natural order. Above all, however, to the rabbit population he is a friend; the focus of Frith in lapine beliefs is his promise to the primal rabbit hero, El-ahrairah, that Frith will never allow his descendants to perish from the face of the earth.

In a physical sense, Frith is the sun, governing the day with his brightness. The rabbits see Frith's benevolence as responsible for warming and lighting the world. This belief is quite understandable among a culture so dependent upon the natural realm; the sun seems to dispel harsh rains and allows crops to grow plentifully. The daily rising and setting of the sun is the most reliable natural event that occurs; even the changing of the seasons is less reliable, due to the variations of mildness and severity from year to year. A number of nature-focused human cultures, such as the ancient Egyptians and followers of the Japanese Shinto religion, have viewed the sun as the ultimate form of deity. James C. Livingston notes that in many early cultures, sun and other sky gods were "connected not only with creation but also with sovereignty. . . [which is a] conception of sacred power that guarantees cosmic order" (Livingston, 172).

This idea of maintaining a cosmic order is central to the lapine understanding of Frith.

It is worth noting that this regularity is key in the lapine understanding of time. The only time during the day known to rabbits is that of ni-Frith (noon). Throughout the story, when an event is to take place during the day, it is always scheduled for ni-Frith. One obvious reason for this is that (aside from dawn or dusk) the time when the sun is directly overhead is the easiest time to explain in precise terms. Less obvious, however, is that the rabbits can be sure that at this time Frith is looking down directly upon them and giving them his divine blessing.

Embodied as the sun, Frith is transcendent from creation while simultaneously acting as a integrated component of it. The sun is wholly detached from the earth by an unfathomable void of sky, yet the sun plays a vital role in the maintenance of natural order by ordaining the pattern of earth's day and night, its warmth, and its light. Without each of these components, creation could not function. In this sense, Frith is wholly intertwined with his natural order, allowing him to be simultaneously transcendent and immanent.

Rabbits recount the tale of Frith's creation of the world as one which coincides with what seems natural to them: bodily functions. Dandelion, the great storyteller of the Watership Down warren, explains that "[l]ong ago, Frith made the world. He made all the stars, too, and the world is one of the stars. He made them by scattering his droppings over the sky and this is why the grass and the trees grow so thick on the world" (*Watership*, 34). The rabbits attribute these qualities to Frith in much the same manner as human religions have often

lended human physical qualities to their respective deities through anthropomorphism. By endowing the concept of deity with attributes much like their own, these individuals are able to transform the concept into the concrete; individuals generally have a much easier time relating to a being who thinks, acts, and sometimes even looks as they do. Through Frith's ability to pass hraka (the term used by the rabbits for droppings), he becomes a being with whom they can identify. Without this sort of identification, Frith the being becomes an abstraction and the rabbit community is unable to rely upon the promise made to El-ahrairah which structures the entire lapine belief system.

The relationship between Frith and his rabbits is centered entirely on this aforementioned promise to the primal rabbit. In the story of creation, Frith created El-ahrairah ("Prince-with-a-Thousand-Enemies" in the rabbit tongue), the first rabbit, simultaneously with the rest of the planet's creatures. Frith created each of these animals as equals, each being a non-aggressive herbivore. They co-existed as friends under Frith because this was his will. Just as Frith passed through the sky with regularity, so too was his creation a simple natural order. El-ahrairah's ego, however, was responsible for the destruction of this order; he allowed his children to eat all the grass and overcrowd all the fields. As this happened, the rest of Frith's creation was thrown out of balance and his other creatures began to suffer. At this point, Frith was forced to alter his creation to maintain its natural balance; the hungry animals were given the skills and desire to hunt El-ahrairah's children. Frith's promise to El-ahrairah, however, was that Frith would provide him with the necessary skills to evade these enemies and

that, as long as he and his children used them, rabbits would never fully perish from the earth. As mentioned previously, Frith's sovereignty is what allowed him the power to alter creation to maintain the natural order as he saw fit. Creatures who were starving would now be fed, and creatures who were overpopulated would have their numbers culled by external means. However, rabbits were allowed a defense (the ability to run, primarily) to ensure their survival. Frith, while having the power to destroy the rabbit race entirely, chose instead to allow them to continue because he saw them to be as much a part of his natural order as every other creature.

To the rabbits of the novel, the important aspect of this tale is that it was through the acts of a rabbit that the natural order was changed. While Frith is recognized as the sole being with the capacity to govern that order, El-ahrairah (and likewise all rabbits thereafter) has the capability to determine whether creation as a whole can fail or succeed. While other animals at the beginning of Frith's creation may have had the capacity to impact the natural order so strongly, only El-ahrairah proved that he had this ability. This fact is important in understanding why the structure of lapine mythology centers around the idea of what it means to be a rabbit. The natural order was changed by El-ahrairah and his descendants while all the animals were yet equal; that is to say, this disturbance occurred before Frith gave his gifts to all of the animals. This is important to note because it means that El-ahrairah disturbed creation using the qualities of wit and wiliness; traits which he, unlike the other animals, possessed

from the moment of creation. As such, this idea proves in the minds of the rabbits that they truly are the most special among equals of Frith's creation.

From this mindset comes the idea that Frith is a special friend to and protector of all rabbitkind, more so than he is to the rest of his creation. The rabbits see themselves as a sort of chosen people of Lord Frith.[2] It is because of this unique feeling for his rabbits that Frith entered into a covenant with them. Because "Frith knows all the rabbits, every one" (*Watership*, 233), he will care for them and keep them safe. According to the rabbit Fiver, whose understanding of the mythic and spiritual realm is well accepted and acknowledged, "[I]n the end, however far away it may seem, Frith keeps his promise to El-ahrairah. I know this, and you can believe it" (*Tales*, 108). Frith's promises can be believed not only because he is the rabbits' friend, but because they can identify with him as a kindred spirit; as El-ahrairah and his descendants are to be tricksters, so is Frith, for it was by a trick that he was able to halt El-ahrairah's ego from undermining creation. Instead of destroying him outright, Frith "determined to get the better of [El-ahrairah], not by means of his own great [destructive] power, but by means of a trick" (*Watership*, 35). By using his wits and giving the other animals the desire

---

[2] While not plentiful, the allusions to major biblical events in lapine mythology are worth noting. In this case, the idea of the relationship between Frith and the rabbits parallels that of the relationship between God and the Hebrews in the Tanakh. In both cases, there is a "chosen people" relationship between the Creator and the creation, solidified and emphasized by a covenant agreement with stipulations on both sides. Additionally, the lapine creation myth contains a few interesting parallels with the book of Genesis: El-ahrairah digging a hole to hide from Frith and the creation turned against him (Adam and Eve hiding from God in the Garden out of shame and embarrassment), and the moment when Frith is forced to alter the harmony of his creation, changing it into a violent place, after El-ahrairah's ego allows his people to overstep their boundaries (the moment when God must ban Adam and Eve from Paradise because they have gained a self-awareness through the sin of eating the fruit of knowledge). One more parallel of note is the brief mention of a story by Dandelion "about a time when Frith had to go away on a journey, leaving the whole world to be covered with rain. But a man built a great floating hutch that held all the animals and birds until Frith returned and let them out" (*Watership*, 214).

to hunt and slay rabbits, Frith was able to teach El-ahrairah the necessity of using his own wits to survive. Thus, Frith was able to teach El-ahrairah a lesson in his own game, creating a special bond between the two who share such a unique and innate abililty. As rabbits can identify themselves with El-ahrairah, the great trickster, they can also identify with the supreme trickster who is their divine friend and companion.

The ability to identify with Frith is important because without an understanding of who Frith is, it would be impossible for the rabbits to have faith in his promise to El-ahrairah. By seeing deity as a fellow trickster, a being who (while on a much higher level) thinks much the same as they do, the rabbits are able to relate to Frith as a trusted friend. This, in turn, allows them the faculties to trust in the example of El-ahrairah in defining what it means to be a rabbit, which in turn molds their entire lives. Since the entire lapine worldview is dependent on how they view themselves (which is dependent upon Frith's promise), Frith himself (the individual being) is not as important as the idea that Frith's word can be trusted. This is why, aside from the story of El-ahrairah's blessing (the creation myth), there are relatively few instances in lapine mythology in which Frith takes an active role. Frith has made a promise, and that fact is well demonstrated in the many myths of El-ahrairah in which he and his people survive despite overwhelming odds. Frith is important in lapine myth only as a representation of the promise which has been made to the rabbit people.

Creation, in the rabbit's perception, is a realm of enemies. Before Frith blessed all the animals with the desire to hunt El-ahrairah, all of the animals were

the same.[3] They ate together, played together, and cared for one another. After Frith's blessing, however, all of the world's creatures who would hunt down rabbits became known as elil (enemies). Sometimes the rabbits refer to them as "The Thousand" (hrair, in the lapine language). Rabbits, as Mr. Adams portrays them, can count no higher than four (due, obviously, to the fact that they have only four legs, and their inability to grasp deep abstraction such as numbers with which they do not have direct experience). Hence, all numbers five and above become hrair. The multitudes of elil in the world greatly outnumber five, and therefore they are referred to as "The Thousand." El-ahrairah means "Prince-with-a-Thousand-Enemies" (thousand-enemies-prince), and was the name given to the first rabbit by Frith after the blessing.

Since non-rabbits became elil after the Frith's blessing of all the animals, and this event was spurred by the actions of El-ahrairah, rabbits also measure their self-importance by the fact that elil exist at all. Not only do rabbits define their own nature by their myths, but they define the nature of most other creatures by this process as well. Rabbits do not exist to provide food for elil; on the contrary, elil exist to help rabbits maintain their proper place in the natural order. This, as further demonstrated by the fact that Frith has made covenants

[3] Technically, not all of Frith's creatures were equal in the beginning. While the rabbit, the fox, the sparrow, the kestrel, and more were all friends and ate together, they did not eat the same things. Some of these creatures ate grass, while others (primarily the birds) ate flies. "[T]here was plenty of grass and plenty of flies, because the world was new and Frith shone down bright and warm all day" (*Watership*, 35). Neither in the beginning or afterwards are small non-mammalian creatures (such as insects, worms, or slugs) considered equals under Frith, nor are they even considered to be individual beings in their own right.

only with rabbits and no other species, only serves to emphasize that rabbits are the chosen creatures around whom the natural order revolves.

However, there is one creature who is not explicitly explained as elil, yet is in many ways the worst enemy of all: humanity. While humankind is not included in myths as elil, it is instead symbolized as the mythic figure of Prince Rainbow. Prince Rainbow is an enigmatic being who occasionally helps rabbitkind, but more often than not tries to bring an end to El-ahrairah through elaborate trickery. Rabbits tend to respect Prince Rainbow for his determination and cunning, which they see almost on par with their own. Additionally, the myths are often confusing regarding to whether Prince Rainbow serves the will of Lord Frith or not, even though he is always claiming such. Likewise, rabbits find people to be enigmatic and are often puzzled by humankind's ways. The problem that rabbits have with people is that many of their ways seem so unnatural and outside of Frith's order. For instance, the novel's characters are often at a loss for understanding how a hrududu (the lapine term for automobile) works, what the purpose of white sticks (cigarettes) is, or how countless other "man-things" are used. The most disturbing unnatural act of people, however, is that they kill without the instinct that other creatures have. Foxes and stoats kill because Frith has ordained it so; two characters, recalling the destruction of their original warren, observed that "[m]en just destroyed the warren because we were in their way. They'll never rest until they've spoiled the earth" (Film).

With the exception of humankind, rabbits define themselves by those who wish to destroy them, and define those who wish to destroy them by the role they

play in supporting the continuation of rabbitkind. The unsettling human factor, which destroys rabbitkind for no understandable reason, can only be explained through the enigmatic character of Prince Rainbow.

El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle: Defining Rabbithood

El-ahrairah, or "Prince-with-a-Thousand-Enemies," was the first rabbit in creation, and the receiver of gifts from Lord Frith and of a grand promise that his people will never perish from the earth. El-ahrairah serves as the basis for almost all of the rabbit myths and folk tales of *Watership Down*. Through this character, the idea of rabbithood, or those rights, privileges, responsibilities, and self-meaning associated with being a rabbit, are explained and relayed from generation to generation. A rabbit's sense of self-worth and self-fulfillment comes from the degree to which he or she can relate to this mythic personality. After hearing the tale of El-ahrairah's blessing, for instance, "each one of [the rabbits] saw himself as El-ahrairah, who could be impudent to Frith and get away with it" (*Watership*, 37).

As the primal rabbit, El-ahrairah was the first creature to embody those traits which rabbits feel make them who they are: diggers, listeners, runners, and cunning masters of trickery. The first three of these qualities were given to El-ahrairah as gifts from Frith upon his blessing, while the last was innate to the rabbit prince from his creation (which, as the rabbits see it, is what drove El-ahrairah to overstep his bounds at the beginning of the world, requiring Frith to bless all of his creatures with gifts to begin with). These gifts were presented to El-ahrairah that he and his people might use them, in collaboration with their wit, to perpetuate the rabbit race.

In as much as El-ahrairah has these rabbit qualities, he acts as the embodiment of them as well. El-ahrairah is not an individual, but rather the archetypical rabbit; he *is* digger, listener, runner, and trickster, or rather he is the true ability to dig, to listen, to run, and to trick. These actions, through the guise of a personality, are the epitome of rabbithood. Each rabbit looks to the actions of El-ahrairah as a blueprint for conduct, striving for (but ultimately failing to attain on an individual level) El-ahrairah's perfection in his or her actions. In the first section of this thesis, the circular pattern of the storytelling process was explained; first the exemplar (El-ahrairah) acts to set an example, then the example is followed, and finally the new act by a particular rabbit becomes engrained in story form and attributed to the exemplar (to reinforce his position and validity in said position). Scholar Daniel L. Pals, in quoting anthropologist Clifford Geertz, states that "[b]ehavior, or action, [is important] 'because it is through the flow of behavior. . . that cultural forms find articulation'" (Pals, 241). Through this articulation in action of the cultural form, the cultural form (of the rabbits of *Watership Down*) is reinforced.

At many points throughout *Watership Down* and *Tales from Watership Down*, the actions of the central characters are referred to in terms that support this idea of the action reinforcing the cultural belief. In the first section, I presented the passage from the novel which tells of the new myth of El-ahrairah, which is in actuality the story of the characters of the novel. In addition, there are at least six other instances between the two books in which the adventures of the characters are somehow referred to in terms relating to El-ahrairah. For

example, in discussing the plans for escape from the warren of Efrafa, Bigwig states that his "friends have prepared a trick that El-ahrairah himself would be proud of" (*Watership*, 333) and that his friends "are far more cunning [than those of the Efrafan Council]. . . [They are] El-ahrairah's Owsla[4], no less" (*Watership*, 331). No doubt, as the escape from Efrafa succeeds, Bigwig's statement may ultimately prove true, in a sense: the adventure of the rabbits from the Watership Down warren will be come solidified for future generations through a story of El-ahrairah, and the various rabbits in the group will all become the helpers and companions of El-ahrairah himself.

This section deals with both El-ahrairah and his companion, Rabscuttle. With the exception of the story of El-ahrairah's blessing, each and every one of his myths involve this character as a key component. In these tales, El-ahrairah is often in a position in which a villain needs to be fooled, or an enemy plot must be uncovered and foiled. Rabscuttle is the individual whom El-ahrairah sends to take care of the necessary activities to assure that his plans succeed. For instance, in the story of the King's lettuce, El-ahrairah's goal is to relieve King Darzin's garden of its beautiful lettuce crop. A wager is made with Prince Rainbow that the rabbit prince can accomplish the task, even though the king is quite aware of what El-ahrairah is planning. While El-ahrairah is able to distract

[4] For those less familiar with the novel, an owsla is a "group of strong or clever rabbits- second-year or older- surrounding the Chief Rabbit and his doe and exercising authority. Owslas vary. In one warren, the [o]wsla may be the band of a warlord; in another, it may consist largely of clever patrollers or garden-raiders" (*Watership*, 14). In any case, the owsla is comprised of the best and most experienced rabbits in the warren. In referring to the Watership Down warren rabbits as El-ahrairah's Owsla, Bigwig is asserting that the abilities of his friends are on par with those whom El-ahrairah himself would associate.

the king by allowing him to watch the rabbit prince, to be sure that he does not steal anything from the royal garden, the faithful Rabscuttle is busy committing the actual theft. In many of the lapine myths, El-ahrairah formulates the plan of trickery while Rabscuttle executes the necessary actions to see that El-ahrairah can both succeed in his plan and escape from any traps set for him by his enemies.

As El-ahrairah defines the nature of rabbithood, Rabscuttle himself defines nothing. However, in the same sense that Frith himself is unimportant while Frith's relationship with the rabbit community (through his promise) is the focus of his importance, it is the relationship between Rabscuttle and El-ahrairah that is fundamental. Through the various tales, the aid that Rabscuttle gives El-ahrairah is symbolic of the role which all rabbits must play to one another. Rabbits are meant to rely on each other to further the success of their individual abilities and continue the species in the face of threatening elil. Rabscuttle symbolizes the necessary relationship between rabbits if they are to survive; Frith's promise was that rabbits (as a community and species) would never perish. He made no such promise regarding to individual rabbits. In this case, the whole truly is greater than the sum of its parts. Without the strength of community in the face of adversity, the rabbits are unable to maximize their abilites, and thus are unable to live up to their side of Frith's covenant. El-ahrairah's people will never be destoyed as long as they bear in mind the ideal relationship between El-ahrairah and his faithful servant and aid one another against The Thousand.

The Black Rabbit of Inlé: The Persona and State of Death

In all cultures, the mystery of death is often the most elusive. Great thinkers have pondered mortality and questioned both the reason for and process of dying. One can fairly state that people of many cultures determine how they live by analyzing and understanding how it is they will die. This fact holds true for the lapine culture of *Watership Down* as well; the rabbits' idea of death, as both a manifested persona (Death) as well as a state (that of being deceased) directly correlates to their idea of self.

Mentioned several times throughout *Watership Down*, the lapine angel of death is a being to whom the characters give reverential awe and view with utter dread. This personification of creation's mortality is known as the Black Rabbit of Inlé. This being has the responsibility of retrieving individuals from the land of the living and escorting them to the land of the dead. As death has always been associated with mysterious darkness, so is the Black Rabbit; he originates from Inlé, which in the lapine vocabulary means either *moon* or *moonrise*[5]. The moon is the opposite of the sun, which is Frith; as Frith is the bestower of life and of blessings, the Black Rabbit of Inlé exists to remove life. However, as the moon is smaller and less luminous than the sun, so is the Black Rabbit subservient to the will of Frith.

[5] It is interesting to note that there is an additional (although very subtle) relationship between Inlé (as the moon in the night sky) and death. A bright full moon in the field of a dark sky is strikingly similar to many human near-death experiences involving a tunnel of darkness with a bright white light at its end, representing the passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead.

While this personification of death is described in lapine terms (as the Black Rabbit), do the characters in the novel regard him as an actual member of their species? This is a difficult question to answer because of the many ways in which the Black Rabbit is described. In the tale of El-ahrairah and the Black Rabbit, Dandelion says that "[T]he Black Rabbit of Inlé *is* a rabbit, but he is that cold, bad dream from which we can only entreat Lord Frith to save us today and tomorrow" (*Watership*, 274). This would lead the reader to believe that the Black Rabbit truly is of El-ahrairah's lineage and that he only possesses such dark qualities due to the role in creation which he has been given. However, in the animated version of the creation myth, the narrator explains that El-ahrairah is frightened of his new enemies because "[h]e had never before seen the Black Rabbit of Death" (Film), implying that this creature was separate from and unknown to him. Additionally, later passages in the novel indicate that the Black Rabbit is no normal rabbit. He is "still as lichen and cold as the stone. . . [His owsla is a group of] shadows without sound or smell. . . [He speaks] with the voice of water that falls into pools in echoing places in the dark [and his eyes are] red with a light that [gives] no light" (*Watership*, 276-277).

How, with these morbid features, can he truly be a rabbit as Dandelion describes? In various places during the tale of El-ahrairah and the Black Rabbit, this being vividly displays his cunning and his wit, the degrees of which rival those of the Prince-with-a-Thousand-Enemies himself. The Black Rabbits bests El-ahrairah in wagers of storytelling and bob-stones (a traditional rabbit guessing game). Additionally, in a scene portrayed only in the animated film interpretation

of the story, the Black Rabbit taunts the visionary rabbit Fiver; the Black Rabbit leads the mourning character (devastated by the news that his older brother, Hazel, has been shot by a farmer) on what seems to be a wild goose chase through the farmer's fields. In this scene, the Black Rabbit is acting as the trickster who cannot be caught, and is hence an active party (as a rabbit) in Frith's promise; for every step which Fiver takes leading him closer to the Black Rabbit (and thus to his brother's death), the understanding of this tragedy slips yet farther from his grasp. The Black Rabbit is truly a rabbit not because of his form or his purpose, but because of his nature.

His purpose in creation, as has been stated, is to judge when, where, and how a rabbit's life should end. This role, while seemingly sinister, is not so. "The truth is. . . that he, too, serves Lord Frith and does no more than his appointed task. . . We go by the will of the Black Rabbit. . . And though that will seems hard and bitter to us all, yet in his way he is our protector, for he knows Frith's promise to the rabbits and he will avenge any rabbit who may chance to be destroyed without the consent of himself" (*Watership*, 274). As this protector, the Black Rabbit saves the life of Hazel after being shot by the farmer. In the film version, he fulfills the role of trickster by leading Fiver on a seemingly pointless prance through the countryside; the Black Rabbit dodges Fiver's grasping of his brother's death. However, the Black Rabbit in this scene ultimately becomes Hazel's salvation by leading Fiver to the spot where the wounded rabbit lies wounded. This moment was not Hazel's moment to die as ordained by the Black Rabbit, and as such the Black Rabbit assured his survival.

At the conclusion of *Watership Down*, when the Black Rabbit has deemed the moment proper for Hazel to die, he makes his only appearance in the novel which is not within the context of a lapine myth. The Black Rabbit approaches Hazel with the gentle kindness of an old friend, without a hint of the darkness with which Dandelion described him. At this point another connection between the Black Rabbit and Inlé, the moon, becomes apparent; the Black Rabbit is not even black at all. As Hazel looks upon him in the dark, he notices this being's "ears. . . shining with a faint silver light" (*Watership*, 475). The Black Rabbit is not black, but rather a gentle, silvery brightness reflecting the love of Frith just as the moon calmly reflects the brightness of the sun. His compassion is obvious in his words to Hazel: "You've been feeling tired. . . but I can do something about that. I've come to ask whether you'd care to join my Owsla. We should be glad to have you and I know you'll enjoy it. If you're ready, we might go along now" (*Watership*, 475). His tone is not harsh or overbearing, and he admits that the time of Hazel's earthly departure is actually up to Hazel himself. As he had lived his life fully and was no longer in a condition adequate to continue an existence proper to a rabbit (due to decreased physical and mental faculties), Hazel admits that his time is finished. At this time, "[i]t seemed to Hazel that he would not be needing his body any more, so he left it lying on the edge of the ditch, but stopped for a moment to watch his rabbits and try to get used to the extraordinary feeling that strength and speed were flowing inexhaustibly out of him into their sleek young bodies and healthy senses" (*Watership*, 475). In

dying, Hazel gives up those physical traits (such as speed and sharpness of the senses) which allowed him to define himself as a rabbit.

The idea of death as an experience which neutralizes the lapine sense of self is a predominant theme throughout the book. Rarely do the characters use terms such as *to die* or *dead*; instead, to die is to *stop running*. Outside of the storytelling tradition, there is but one religious ritual employed by the rabbits of *Watership Down*: a statement of sorrow recounted upon the death of a companion which reads, "My heart has joined the Thousand, for my friend stopped running today" (*Watership*, 120). This phrase is highly important because it underlines the importance of the rabbits' self-identification with their Frith-given abilities. Without their blessings, rabbits are no more rabbits than they are dogs, kestrels, hawks, foxes, or any of the other elil. In reflecting on their friend's demise, they are forced to consider their own; as such, they realize that one day the Black Rabbit will strip them of many of the qualities which make them rabbits. With this thought, their hearts *have* joined the Thousand.

While the Black Rabbit is referred to as a being of Inlé, the moon, it is important to note that the lapine idea of a realm of the dead is never stated in extraterrestrial terms. In fact, according to one story, El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle travel to the realm of the Black Rabbit and throughout their journey the terrain becomes more and more harsh. Finally, once they reach their goal, the terrain becomes quite inhospitable and covered with patches of rock, moss, and snow. This is but one instance of many in which the realm of the dead is referred to in terms of physical location. Fiver tells Hazel that "there's another place- another

country. . . We go there when we sleep; at other times, too; and when we die" (*Watership*, 253). As death is irreversible, so to is the journey to the land of Inlé for most any rabbit. As Holly points out, retrieving a friend who has stopped running from the land of Inlé is akin to an impossible task (*Watership*, 255).

It is important to note that the lapine afterworld is a physical one because it reinforces the fact that these rabbits define themselves in terms of their attributes. It seems almost paradoxical that they define death in the loss of their primary physical ability (that of running), yet even after this physical aspect is lost they cling to an idea of a physical afterlife. The reason for this is that as they root their self-identities in their physical selves, they are unable to perceive any other aspect of existence. Their relationship with the divine, with the forces of death, with elil, and with each other are rooted in the physical because that is how the rabbits view themselves: in terms of their physical attributes.

Divergent Warrens: Shining Wires and Efrafa

Within the storyline of the original novel, the rabbit characters interact with primarily four different rabbit warrens: the Sandleford warren (which they abandon at the beginning of their quest), the Watership Down warren (which they establish as their new home), Cowslip's warren (which is infested with snares and thus deemed the Warren of Shining Wires), and Efrafa (which, led by General Woundwort, wages a brutal war against the Watership Down warren). Of these four, it seems that the mythos and belief system of the first two are fairly close to the general consensus lapine worldview. The two latter warrens, however, each deviate from these traditional views to an extreme degree. This section will briefly discuss how, due to the unnatural influence of humanity, these two warrens lost sight of their rabbithood and pursued opposite lifestyles fiercely at odds with Frith's will.

Cowslip's warren is never named by the character's in the novel, but the Warren of Shining Wires is an apt name for this aberration of lapine society. As was mentioned, the grounds around this warren are replete with wire snares. These snares are placed by a local man who provides Cowslip and his companions with *flayrah* (food of unusually good quality, such as lettuce and carrots). The rabbits of the Warren of Shining Wires occasionally lose a member of their group to one of the man's snares; however, they continue to live in this situation because (with the exception of the occasional unlucky rabbit who loses his life to the snares) it provides them with seemingly unparalleled safety. The

man not only provides them with excellent food, but his presence also wards off any approaching elil.

When the central characters arrive and visit this warren, however, they are completely ignorant as to the true nature of the place. Only Fiver senses that "there's something unnatural and evil twisted all [a]round" (*Watership*, 96) the warren. He constantly warns his companions that something about Cowslip's warren is not safe and that he feels a bizarre notion of deception around the entire place. Unfortunately, it is not until his companion Bigwig almost dies in a snare that the remaining rabbits take notice accordingly.

Due to the close and constant interactions with humankind, the rabbits of Cowslip's warren have lost sight of their sense of rabbithood. Upon his arrival at the warren, Bigwig ironically comments that "[a] couple of hrududil could go down some of [the warren's] holes" (*Watership*, 78), and figuratively speaking he is not far from the truth. The man's influence has so infested the warren that El-ahrairah is here seen only as a quaint story with no substance or meaning; instead, these rabbits focus on themselves. Cowslip states, "Our poems and stories are mostly about our own lives here. . . El-ahrairah doesn't really mean much to us" (*Watership*, 108). Additionally, one of Cowslip's fellows states that "[Rabbits do not need tricks.] Rabbits need dignity and, above all, the will to accept their fate" (*Watership*, 108). This nihilistic outlook of the rabbits of the Warren of Shining Wires summarizes their skewed spirituality. El-ahrairah, and thus the promise of Frith that they will survive, means nothing to this group of

rabbits which has accepted in their minds the idea that their trickery is exercised only in vain.

Silverweed, the most renowned poet of the Warren of Shining Wires, echoes the general feelings of doom among his comrades in the poem he recites for his guests.[6] This poem, filled with visions of despair, recounts feelings of helplessness and the constant knowledge that death awaits. The imagery in the poem is that of passing streams, falling leaves, and dark journeys; these ideas are quite disturbing to the visiting rabbits because these visions ignore the idea that Frith has promised El-ahrairah that his people will never perish. Because of the constant and unnatural death surrounding the Shining Wires rabbits imposed upon them by humanity, they cannot accept the belief that they are meant to survive. In accepting this supposed fate, they symbolically surrender who they are and what they have the potential to become.

Since the rabbits of this strange warren are unable to identify themselves properly in the scheme of nature, they become strange indeed in one very striking aspect. They have adopted a key human trait: abstract thought. This understanding of abstraction arises in the form of comprehending shapes. A shape is a symbol which consciously represents something; while traditional rabbits use symbols as well (via myth), they do not see them as such. The rabbits of the Warren of Shining Wires have reached a point at which they have forsaken their unconscious symbols for conscious ones. In various passages in their warren, these rabbits have created pictures by pressing small stones into

[6] See this poem in Appendix A.

the mud walls. Of these images, the supposed best is the image of El-ahrairah from the story of the King's lettuce. While the Shining Wires rabbits can decipher this collection of stones, Hazel and his companions are bewildered; "how could stones be El-ahrairah? What, exactly, was it that Strawberry was saying was El-ahrairah? In confusion [Hazel] said, 'I don't understand'" (*Watership*, 85).

While Cowslip's warren had abandoned its sense of self (as well as the symbolic religious structure which supported it and the hope which it created) in exchange for the abstract world of humans, the warren of Efrafa did very much the opposite. In actuality, this warren, dominated by a massive and vicious rabbit named General Woundwort, suffered the same problem as the Warren of Shining Wires, and for the same reason, but in an entirely different manner. Both warrens lost sight and overstepped the boundaries of their natural roles through the influence of humankind, and members of both fell victim to a mindset of malaise (if not sheer dread). However, while Cowslip's warren embraced the man's encroachment, Efrafa was created in such a manner as to be entirely self-contained and independent from the wills of both humanity and elil.

As with the Warren of Shining Wires, Efrafa was a den of unnatural lifestyle. General Woundwort managed his warren in a highly regimented fashion; "[e]verything that's happened [at Efrafa] is unnatural- the fighting, the breeding- and all on account of Woundwort" (*Watership*, 467). In exchange for natural lives, the members of Efrafa received the security of knowing that people (as well as elil) would remain as far off as possible. The openings to Woundwort's warren were very well concealed, and rabbits were only allowed

above ground to feed at very specific times (and even then in very limited numbers). "[E]veryone's good depends on everyone's cooperation" (*Watership*, 317), instead of upon the trust in Frith's promise to El-ahrairah (whose stories are not told in Efrafa). This cooperation is achieved by ignoring the natural rabbit lifestyle (running above ground, not burying hraka, and so on), as well as by usurping the power of those who would naturally keep the rabbit population at its proper position. To Woundwort, elil are just another sort of annoying creature that threatens his (and his warren's) safety, and as such he sees the need to seize and destroy the position they hold. Woundwort is renowned to have killed various vicious elil on his own, and he would even "have hunted like elil if he could" (*Watership*, 467).

As with the Warren of Shining Wires, the despair of the denizens of Efrafa contributed to a tradition of nihilistic poetry. Hyzenthlay, one of the more spiritually-minded rabbits of Efrafa, composed a poem much like that of Silverweed's.[7] The difference between the two, however, is that Hyzenthlay's poem exhibits signs of hoping for hope. While Silverweed's poem had completely forsaken any desire to end the path towards destruction, Hyzenthlay's is not truly nihilistic because of her subtle desire to be freed from the unnatural bondage under the control of General Woundwort.

In both the Warren of Shining Wires and Efrafa, the rabbits surrender their religious covenant of protection for a situation of safety that is unnatural. This state of non-religion fulfills the rabbits' need for religion in that it defines how they

[7] See this poem in Appendix B.

exist in relation to the world around them. However, this unnatural definition of themselves, while providing a sense of sanctuary, relieves them of their capability of freedom to express their sense of rabbithood. Cowslip's companions are stranded in a spiritual prison of abstraction which robs them of their ability to determine their own fate in the natural world. Woundwort's subjects, conversely, are trapped in a physical prison which deprives them of both physical autonomy as well as the experience of understanding themselves through a rabbit's physical potential.

Conclusion

Richard Adams, the renowned British author, has enchanted millions through the inspiring adventures of Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig, and the rest of his beloved lapine characters in *Watership Down*. In part, these characters are so memorable due to the author's attention to detail and his ability to communicate his vision of their lives in such intimate detail. Of the various aspects of their lives, such as language and social structure, the most powerful is that of their spiritual side. Mr. Adams has crafted a unique quasi-religious belief system in which the rabbit characters are able to define themselves in the world in which they live.

Without a basic understanding of this idea, the novel and its rabbits are mere shadows of what they are capable of becoming. This thesis has shown that these characters have a faith rooted in the storytelling tradition, which perpetuates the idea that the spiritual and the physical worlds are intertwined and that these realms are dependent upon a divinely-ordained natural order. The rabbits use their stories as a means to communicate their idea of self (as it exists within this natural order) to the next generation. Through their vision of self the rabbits act, and from these actions are born stories for future generations. Thus, the storytelling tradition perpetuates the rabbit species through their own idea of what it means to be a rabbit.

Taking this aspect of Mr. Adams' story into account, the reader is drawn into a whole new realm in which Hazel and his companions become as vivid as close friends. In pursuing this study, I was blessed with a deeper appreciation of

the novel as well as the study of religion. Through the analysis of the depth to which individuals define themselves through their actions and beliefs, I realize now the importance of lifestyle in a religious context.

Most importantly, however, this thesis has allowed me to understand the personalities of *Watership Down* more fully than I could have previously imagined possible. This story has been a true favorite in my library since I was a child, and I feel as though Hazel's friends are as much his friends as my own. Throughout this project, my eyes have been opened to the vastness of Mr. Adams' vision and creativity. It is my sincere hope that this thesis allows others this chance as well.

Appendix A

Silverweed's Poem

The wind is blowing, blowing over the grass.
It shakes the willow catkins; the leaves shine silver.
Where are you going, wind? Far, far away
Over the hills, over the edge of the world.
Take me with you, wind, high over the sky.
I will go with you, I will be rabbit-of-the-wind,
Into the sky, the feathery sky and the rabbit.
The stream is running, running over the gravel,
Through the brooklime, the kingcups, the blue and
gold of spring.
Where are you going, stream? Far, far away
Beyond the heather, sliding away all night.
Take me with you, stream, away in the starlight.
I will go with you, I will be rabbit-of-the-stream,
Down through the water, the green water and the
rabbit.
In autumn the leaves come blowing, yellow and brown.
They rustle in the ditches, they tug and hang on the
hedge.
Where are you going, leaves? Far, far away
Into the earth we go, with the rain and the berries.
Take me, leaves, O take me on your dark journey.
I will go with you, I will be rabbit-of-the-leaves,
In the deep places of the earth, the earth and the
rabbit.

Frith lies in the evening sky. The clouds are red about
him.
I am here, Lord Frith, I am running through the long
grass.
O take me with you, dropping behind the woods,
Far away, to the heart of light, the silence.
For I am ready to give you my breath, my life,
The shining circle of the sun, the sun and the rabbit (*Watership*, 109-110).

Appendix B

Hyzenthlay's Poem

Long ago
The yellowhammer sang, high on the thorn.
He sang near a litter that the doe brought out to play,
He sang in the wind and the kittens played below.
Their time slipped by all under the elder bloom.
But the bird flew away and now my heart is dark
And time will never play in the fields again.

Long ago
The orange beetles clung to the rye-grass stems.
The windy grass was waving. A buck and a doe
Ran through the meadow. They scratched a hole in
the bank,
They did what they pleased all under the hazel
leaves.
But the beetle died in the frost and my heart is dark;
And I shall never choose a mate again.

The frost is falling, the frost falls into my body.
My nostrils, my ears are torpid under the frost.
The swift will come in the spring, crying "News!
News!
Does, dig new holes and flow with milk for your
litters."
I shall not hear. The embryos return
Into my dulled body. Across my sleep
There runs a wire fence to imprison the wind.
I shall never feel the blowing wind again (*Watership*, 323).

Appendix C

Glossary of Utilized Lapine Terminology

Bob-stones A traditional game among rabbits.

Efrafa The name of the warren founded by General Woundwort.

El-ahrairah The rabbit folk hero. The name (Elil-hrair-rah) means "Enemies-Thousand-Prince" = the Prince with a Thousand Enemies.

Elil Enemies (of rabbits).

Flayrah Unusually good food, e.g. lettuce.

Frith The sun, personified as a god by rabbits.

Hrair A great many; an uncountable number; any number over four. U Hrair = The Thousand (enemies).

Hraka Droppings, excrement.

Hrududu A tractor, car, or motor vehicle.

Inlé Literally, the moon; also moonrise. But a second meaning carries the idea of darknes, fear, and death.

Ni-Frith Noon.

Owsla The strongest rabbits in a warren, the ruling clique.

(*Watership*, 476-477)

Works Cited

1. Adams, Richard. *Tales from Watership Down*. New York: Avon Books, 1996.

2. Adams, Richard. *Watership Down.* New York: Avon Books, 1975.

3. Livingston, James C. *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion.* New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1993.

4. Pals, Daniel L. *Seven Theories of Religion.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

5. *Watership Down.* Dir. Martin Rosen. Perf. John Hurt, Richard Briers, Denholm Elliot, Harry Andrews, and Michael Hordern. Warner Home Video, 1990.